

Michaud Joins Secretary of Commerce to Announce \$25.4 Million Broadband Expansion Project

Thursday, December 17 2009

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"High speed internet is a reality for many, but it is still out of reach for thousands of Mainers and small businesses," said Michaud. "The funding announced today will change that and finally bridge the divide between the rural and urban parts of our state."

The Three Ring Binder project proposes to create an open access fiber-optic network extending to the most rural and disadvantaged areas of the Maine ‐ from the Saint John Valley in the north, to the rocky coastline of downeast Maine, to the mountainous regions of Western Maine ‐ linking the unserved and underserved areas of the state together with a modern communications network. The project proposes construction of a 1,100-mile network that will pass through more than 100 communities containing more than 110,000 households, 600 community anchor institutions, and a number of last mile service providers. A map illustrating the project's reach can be found [here](#).

"It's hard for our rural businesses to compete without adequate access to broadband," said Michaud. "This collaborative project will help level the playing field. As we look to rebuild our economy in the wake of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, this investment will help businesses throughout rural Maine compete and create jobs. It will also create construction jobs that are needed to lay the high capacity cable. This work will provide immediate economic ripple effects that will benefit communities throughout our state."

The text of Michaud's letter is below.

November 16, 2009

The Honorable Lawrence E. Strickling

Assistant Secretary for Communications and Information

U.S. Department of Commerce

Room 4898

1401 Constitution Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20230

Dear Assistant Secretary Strickling:

I am writing to confirm my support for the Three Ring Binder Project that was submitted by Biddeford Internet Corporation (d.b.a. GWI) for funding through the Broadband Technologies Opportunities Program (BTOP). The Project is the result of a collaborative effort among various Maine-based telecommunications carriers, Internet service providers and community anchor institutions, including the University of Maine System. If funded, the Project will help eliminate the digital divide that has left the most rural portions of Maine, including much of the Second Congressional District, without adequate access to the Internet.

The Project would establish 1,100 miles of high-capacity fiber optic cable that would be deployed in three rings throughout Maine. The Project is named "Three Ring Binder" because the three fiber rings will bind together the parts of Maine that have adequate broadband access to those that do not. It is my understanding that the ConnectME Authority, an agency formed by the State of Maine for the purpose of fostering the expansion of broadband to the un-served and under-served areas of the state, considers the lack of middle mile dark fiber to be the primary stumbling block preventing the expansion of broadband access throughout rural Maine.

The Project will be owned by Maine Fiber Company (MFC), a single-purpose entity whose only asset will be the Project. MFC, which will be backed by local investors, will offer dark fiber to carriers and end-users on a non-discriminatory, open access basis subject to a cost-based tariff to be filed with the Maine Public Utilities Commission. The Project will thereby greatly expand the availability of dark fiber in Maine's rural areas, thus helping to eliminate the key problem that has hindered, if not prevented, broadband expansion in rural Maine.

The State of Maine took the role assigned to the states in the Notice of Funding Availability very seriously. The Maine Legislature established a Broadband Strategy Council to evaluate projects proposed for funding and directed the Council to forward its finding to the ConnectME Authority for review. The Broadband Strategy Council carefully evaluated all Maine-based projects seeking funding and gave the Three Ring Binder Project a very favorable recommendation, as did the ConnectME Authority. Governor John Baldacci endorsed the positive recommendations of the Council and the Authority in his letter to you.

While there are a number of crucial benefits that the Project would bring to my District, I would like to highlight a very important comment that was made during a meeting with Professor Bruce Segee, a computer scientist at the University of Maine at Orono. Professor Segee observed that, regardless of the particular field of study, university research today consists primarily of amassing and analyzing large data fields. He pointed out that without an adequate information highway, the data needed for today's research cannot be obtained, severely restricting the scope of research that can be conducted in poorly-served areas. Since the Three Ring Binder Project will link all of the campuses of the University of Maine, including those located in the most rural and remote areas of the state, Professor Segee sees the Project as a means for eliminating the restrictions on data accumulation that currently limits academic research on many Maine campuses.

Maine's Second Congressional District has the distinction of being the largest Congressional District east of the Mississippi River. The Three Ring Binder Project will create an information superhighway linking most of the towns and key community anchor institutions throughout my District. This investment is necessary to attract new businesses and begin the long process of re-generating the many jobs lost due to the decline of our traditional resource-based industries. I therefore ask for your careful consideration of this very important Project, subject to all applicable laws and regulations.

With warmest regards,

Michael H. Michaud

Member of Congress

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